

# Better information, better decisions, better services

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## Setting a strategic vision for housing

A guide to demanding better information



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**Part 1** – The purpose of the guide.

**Part 2** – Demanding better information; objectives, scale and impact, assessing costs and understanding public opinion.

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# Setting a strategic vision for housing

## Part 1 – The purpose of the guide



# Setting your strategic vision for housing?

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## This guide is ...

- one of a series produced by the Audit Commission alongside the national reports *Building Better Lives* and *Is there something I should know?* More information on the study and supporting material can be found at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

## It is aimed at ...

- decision makers in councils: elected members; service directors and heads of service.

## It will help you ...

- specify the information you need when setting a strategic vision for housing. Better information will help you make better decisions, which will lead to a housing vision that meets the areas needs and complements other local objectives.

# Good information is essential when setting a strategic vision for housing.

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- Information on housing needs, aspirations, population projections and the local economy can help you plan future housing developments that meet need and contribute to economic growth.
- Without this information you could build the wrong type of houses, in the wrong area or without appropriate links to transport or employment, wasting valuable land and resources on properties that will not meet the needs of people in your area.
- Information at a neighbourhood level, for example house prices, time to re-let a property, number of vacant properties and levels of deprivation can tell you a lot about the desirability of that area. Identifying low demand neighbourhoods and the reasons they are less desirable will aid the development of a policy response to tackle the issue.

# And a strategic housing vision is not all about new build...

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- Over 85 per cent of the housing in England is over 20 years old and 19 per cent is over 90 years old. There is massive potential in the current housing stock, but good information is essential in order to unlock it.
- Good information on where empty properties are, who owns them and why they are currently empty can help you set a strategy on how to bring them back into use, providing additional homes and removing eyesores.

# Setting a strategic vision for housing

## Part 2 – Demanding better information

- Objectives
- Impact of different approaches
- Assessing cost benefit
- The public



# The information that will help you to

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## **Bring clarity on your objectives**

- What are you trying to achieve through your sustainable community strategy?
- What is the role of housing in achieving these aims?
- What are your constraints?

## **Understand the scale of housing issues in your area**

- What are the characteristics of the housing markets that effect your area?
- What are the housing needs in your area?

## **Assess the costs**

- What do the options cost, and where does the funding come from?
- What will the different options deliver?

## **Understand public opinion**

- How have you taken account of stakeholders views?
- What do the public think

# What are you trying to achieve?

<b>Objectives</b>	
<b>What are you trying to achieve?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved health and wellbeing?</li><li>• Better education?</li><li>• A thriving economy?</li><li>• Carbon footprint reduction?</li><li>• Improved access to services?</li><li>• Reduction in crime and anti social behaviour?</li><li>• A feeling of belonging?</li></ul>
<b>How can housing contribute?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good quality housing to achieve health and wellbeing</li><li>• A settled home so young people can prosper</li><li>• A suitable housing offer for the current and future population</li><li>• Energy efficient homes reduce carbon emissions, and reduce the cost of bills</li><li>• Homes in the right place with good transport links to jobs and services</li><li>• Well designed neighbourhoods to reduce anti-social behaviour</li><li>• Mixed tenure communities where people feel they belong</li></ul>
<b>What are the constraints/enablers?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding</li><li>• Land availability</li><li>• Availability of required skills</li><li>• Stretching targets</li><li>• Involvement/co-operation of partners</li><li>• Access to, and use of, information</li></ul>

# The **scale and impact** of housing issues

Factors to consider	Key questions	Examples of information that will help
<b>What are the characteristics of the local housing market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What properties are currently there?</li> <li>• What is the tenure mix?</li> <li>• Where are they situated?</li> <li>• What do they cost?</li> <li>• How affordable is housing?</li> <li>• What is the quality of the properties?</li> <li>• How many houses are unoccupied/under occupied?</li> <li>• What are the planned developments in the area?</li> <li>• How does the housing market interact with other housing markets in the region/sub-region?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing strategy statistical appendix (HSSA) data - type, tenure, and level of voids</li> <li>• Council tax register - type, tenure, voids, location</li> <li>• HM land registry - house prices</li> <li>• RSLs - type, condition, and location of properties, level of occupation, planned new developments</li> <li>• LA registers of licensed houses in multiple occupation</li> <li>• Planning permission – future developments</li> <li>• Analysis through the strategic housing market assessment</li> <li>• Stock condition survey</li> </ul>

# The **scale and impact** of housing issues

Factors to consider	Key questions	Examples of information that will help
<b>What is the housing need?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the current demand for housing (including size, price and location)?</li> <li>• What is the forecasted future demand?</li> <li>• What are the needs of the diverse population?</li> <li>• How has the make up of the housing register changed over time?</li> <li>• What are the characteristics of those classed as homeless?</li> <li>• Where is the greatest need in your area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local housing waiting list</li> <li>• Local housing management systems – overcrowding, under occupation, temporary accommodation, vulnerability</li> <li>• Housing needs survey</li> <li>• ONS - population information</li> <li>• Annual survey of hours and earnings (ASHE) – incomes</li> <li>• Labour force survey (ONS)</li> <li>• CLG (household change)</li> <li>• Partners               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– estate agents (enquiries information)</li> <li>– RSLs (housing registers)</li> <li>– private landlords (demand)</li> <li>– Developers (demand)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Local surveys (resident views)</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips

## The relevance and quality of data on impacts

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### Bear in mind that ...



**You will need the right data over the right time period. Analysis of the changes in the housing market and housing need over a number of years will give you a comprehensive and valuable picture.**



**Housing markets and housing needs are not constrained by council boundaries. It is likely that housing markets will go beyond your boundaries into other council areas and there may be more than one housing market within your boundaries. Understanding how housing markets interact with neighbouring markets is important when setting a housing strategy.**



**Looking at the housing market and housing needs on an area basis can only tell you so much. Breaking the information down to smaller localities, such as neighbourhoods, will provide useful knowledge on how the housing stock and housing needs differ within your area.**

# Hints and tips

## The relevance and quality of data on impacts

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### Bear in mind that ...



Local areas conduct various assessments and surveys relating to housing (including strategic housing market assessments, housing needs assessments and strategic land availability assessments). It is important that you are clear what questions you are trying to answer through these assessments and scope the assessments appropriately. It is much easier to collect data to answer specific questions than to try to form questions to fit data that has already been collected.



The Audit Commission has produced a tool that gives an overview of the housing market issues in local authority areas across England. You can access the tool [here](#).

# Assessing **cost benefit** implications.

Factors to consider	Key questions	The information that will help
<b>What do each of the options cost and what is the funding stream?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the demands? (Improving current housing, building new housing, making better use of private sector housing, bringing empty properties into use, facilitating wider regeneration and growth, creating new towns, changing the tenure mix)</li><li>• What are the resource requirements to meet the demands?</li><li>• What are the funding streams to meet the demands? (HCA, housing associations, landlords, developers, government, the council, private finance)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Historic cost data</li><li>• Quotes for delivering services</li><li>• Neighbouring council information</li><li>• Benchmarking clubs</li><li>• Current and future budgets (internal)</li><li>• Press and web sites of funding bodies</li></ul>

# Assessing **cost benefit** implications.

Factors to consider	Key questions	Examples of information that will help
<b>What will the different options deliver?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the costs and benefits of meeting the different demands?</li> <li>• What are the consequences of no action?</li> <li>• Do the outcomes complement the areas wider objectives (set out in the sustainable community strategy)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting people local financial benefits model (CLG)</li> <li>• Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) cost calculator (BRE/CIEH)</li> <li>• Evaluation of previous initiatives</li> <li>• Performance measures (historic)</li> <li>• Neighbours performance measures</li> <li>• Benchmarking clubs</li> <li>• Resident feedback/local surveys</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips

## The relevance and quality of data to assess costs and benefits

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### **Bear in mind that ...**



**There will rarely be perfect forecast data on the impact of different approaches. But it is better to have imperfect information to use as proxy to make judgements about the most appropriate and cost effective scheme.**



**When conducting a cost benefit analysis, the full range of benefits need to be considered, both to individuals (including health and wellbeing benefits, education benefits and access to jobs and services) and the area (including community safety, economic regeneration and community cohesion).**



**Identifying wider impacts and benefits and evidencing them may help in generating pooled budgets from partners who share these wider priorities – for example the health and wellbeing benefits from a scheme that improves private sector housing will be of interest to health providers. The LSP and other local partnerships are useful forums to facilitate these links and encourage joined up working.**

## What do **stakeholders** think?

Factors to consider	Key questions	Examples of information that will help
<p><b>How have you taken account of stakeholders views?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the stakeholders? (RSLs, Developers, supported housing providers, VCS, private sector landlords, HCA, lenders, the community)</li> <li>• What do these stakeholders think?</li> <li>• How have stakeholders views informed the housing vision?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LSP consultation</li> <li>• Stakeholder groups</li> <li>• Local consultation exercises</li> </ul>
<p><b>What do the public think?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have you collected public opinion?</li> <li>• Do you know the views of different groups within the community? (Gypsies and travellers, people with disabilities, BME groups, older people, young people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place survey</li> <li>• Community groups</li> <li>• Local consultation/ surveys</li> </ul>

# Hints and tips – The relevance and quality of data about public opinion

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## Bear in mind that ...



**Different stakeholders have different interests and it is important to consider information from all stakeholders. For example, registered social landlords may want to build more social housing to meet the need on their housing registers. However local people may not want housing to be built on local green areas. Weighing stakeholders' views appropriately, and alongside other council priorities, will help to make the best decision.**



**Public perception is difficult to measure and there is often no single answer – in addition majority views may not be the most vocal ones. Combining and comparing data from different sources – for example, enquiries, complaints, meetings, surveys, and focus groups – will help to build up the picture.**

# Agreeing the strategic vision for housing

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## Part 3 – Examples and case study



# Example – Combining evidence to gain greater insight

**A council is getting mixed messages.** Housing associations and residents all maintain there is a need for larger family housing. The council statistics show low levels of larger households in the area.

Analysis of census/ONS population data, combined with GP registration data from the PCT ( and housing association/ council waiting lists data

**Census population data gives existing situational data but it can be out of date. ONS provides mid year population estimates that are more up to date. Data from the PCT will give new and emerging population information (ONS migration data is also useful for this). Waiting list data will provide a more complete picture.**



Survey data

**Survey data will identify resident needs and aspirations.**



Visits to community groups and workshops in schools

**These can help can help validate or challenge current perceptions about household formation and help understand if there is a real need for larger family homes.**

**Combining data in this way provides a better picture of resident aspirations and takes into account new communities moving into an area.**

# Example – Tackling a problem with a range of evidence based, low cost solutions

A council receives complaints from local residents, police and local businesses that the number of empty homes in the area is causing problems. There is public support for significant intervention in the area which is beyond the council's resources

Solution 1 – The council conducts surveys and meets with residents, police and businesses to establish the specific issues associated with the empty properties. Different issues call for different measures.

Some problems, such as vandalism, require short term solutions such as securing the property to prevent access. In the long term, refurbishment or demolition is needed to bring the properties into use and regenerate the area.



Solution 2 – The council establish ownership of the properties (through council tax registers, electoral rolls or land registry) and ascertains reasons why they are empty and ways of bringing them back into use

An understanding of why properties are empty can result in appropriate solutions being decided on and implemented to solve the issue.



Solution 3 - The council looks at case studies from the housing market renewal pathfinders to see how others have tackled the problem. It holds meetings with housing associations/private landlords to look at possible co-funding options

Case studies provided the council with examples of others approaches but more expensive and resource intensive solutions could not be met from the council's budget. The council seeks private sector partners to co-fund and deliver these.

In order to revitalise the area the council looks at a range of information to develop low cost strategic solutions, which brings back confidence to an area.

## Case studies – Collecting and using information

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- **The Oxfordshire Data Observatory was set up by the LSP to interpret and explain contextual trends at both a county and local level. For a small annual charge the observatory provides a comprehensive central data resource to the County Council, the districts and other partners, reducing the need for individual research or analysis to be conducted. It also runs a direct enquiry service to help inform local policy development and monitoring of service delivery.**
- **The Manchester Salford Partnership uses a Geographic information system (GIS) to map economic and demographic trends and to assess the impact of initiatives and strategies. The maps show housing, crime, education and worklessness indicators over time at postcode level. Interventions can then be overlaid to see the effects that different initiatives have had on different indicators.**

## Want to know more?

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Additional resources for understanding housing markets and setting a strategic housing vision:

- **Strategic - Housing Market Assessments: Practice Guidance (Communities and Local Government)**  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/strategichousingmarket>
- **Housing Market renewal good practice case studies (Audit Commission)** <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/goodpractice/marketrenewal>
- **Strategic housing (IDeA)**  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=6132520>
- **Housing Markets tool (Audit Commission)**  
<http://www.housingmarkets.audit-commission.gov.uk/>
- **Building Better Lives report and tools (Audit Commission)**  
<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/buildingbetterlives>